

Resource 7:

**Answering 'backlash'
and 'resistance'
questions about the
National Community
Attitudes towards
Violence against
Women Survey (NCAS)**

Dealing with backlash

The term ‘backlash’ is often used interchangeably with ‘resistance’ to describe any form of resistance towards progressive social change.⁹ VicHealth has developed a very useful resource, (En)countering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives. This resource assists those working to promote gender equality to identify and assess the backlash they experience from milder forms to the more extreme or aggressive forms. “The idea of equality can provoke strong feelings – these are long-held social norms that are being challenged. You often know you’re starting to get results with your gender equality initiatives when you meet resistance.”¹⁰

Practitioners working in the primary prevention of violence against women can experience backlash, so it is important to be prepared. The VicHealth resource is useful in this preparation. In relation to preparing for backlash when using the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) NCAS Stakeholder Kit highlights a set of example responses to common ‘resistance’ or ‘backlash’ questions.

“Why is the research focused on violence against women? What about violence against men?”

- The NCAS is funded under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan). It measures changes in attitudes over time in order to measure progress under the National Plan.
- Violence against anyone is unacceptable, but men and women tend to experience violence in different ways and in different contexts. **Women are nearly 3 times more likely than men to experience intimate partner violence, and 4 times more likely than men to experience sexual violence.**¹¹
- The NCAS research focuses on the specific problem of violence against women.

“Gender equality doesn’t have anything to do with violence against women.”

- **Gender inequality involves devaluing or disrespecting women or women’s contributions. Research has consistently found that these forms of disrespect increase the likelihood of violence against women.** The NCAS shows that people who support gender inequality are also more likely to support violence against women.
- **Preventing violence against women starts with challenging attitudes and systems that support gender inequality.** The NCAS is one way for us to track that change.

⁹ VicHealth. (2018). *(En)countering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives*. Melbourne: VicHealth.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2016*.(Cat. no. 4906.0). Canberra: ABS.

“Does this survey really represent Australia?”

The NCAS is a representative population survey. It has a very large, random sample of 17,500 Australians. It is matched with census benchmarks and weighting is used to correct any imbalances.

“This research is biased.”

- This survey is the world’s longest running survey of its kind.
- It is led by ANROWS in close partnership with leading Australian research institutions: The University of Melbourne, RMIT University, the Social Research Centre, UNSW, and VicHealth. It uses rigorous and widely accepted methodologies.
- The research has also been peer reviewed by national and international experts.

“Why are we spending time on exploring attitudes to domestic violence and gender inequality when Australia has so many other important issues to tackle?”

- On average, 1 woman every 9 days is killed by her intimate partner.¹²
- The problem of violence and disrespect towards women is prevalent and has significant health, social and economic costs for women and society as a whole.
- **Attitudes are important because they play a role in shaping the world around us, including how we respond to this important problem. We have a role to play in shifting this landscape.**

Attitudes are important because they play a role in shaping the world around us, including how we respond to this important problem

On average, 1 woman every 9 days is killed by her intimate partner¹²

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019*. Cat. no. FDV 3. Canberra: AIHW.

“How does research into violence against women and gender equality change anything? Why don’t we put the money into support services instead?”

- Certainly, responding to violence against women is of critical importance. So too is preventing this violence before it starts.
- Attitudes play an important role in shaping the world around us, and therefore play an important role in prevention.

“This isn’t a problem for everyone, aren’t the [insert specific demographic] the ones we need to focus on?”

- The NCAS has shown that attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality across Australia are not strongly related to location or socio-economic status.
- No matter who we are or where we come from, we all have a role to play in changing these negative attitudes.

One of the risks of not taking women’s claims seriously is that perpetrators can continue to offend

“If attitudes are getting better, why isn’t the problem of violence against women getting any better?”

- The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is not direct, but complex.
- It takes considerable time to change entrenched human attitudes and behaviours. While the NCAS did find some positive change in attitudes, we do still have a long way to go.
- It is important that we continue to build on the momentum of change shown in the NCAS results.

“Gender equality is great, but that doesn’t mean that women don’t lie about sexual assault.”

- Studies have consistently found that false allegations of sexual assault are rare.
- For women, there is little to be gained from lying. They’re often not believed, their choices intensely scrutinised, and they risk being publicly shamed for speaking out. These are some of the reasons why 9 out of 10 women who have been sexually assaulted do not report to the police. Our attitudes are part of what shapes this response.
- One of the risks of not taking women’s claims seriously is that perpetrators can continue to offend.

Reference: ANROWS. (2018). *Australians’ attitudes to violence against women and gender equality: The 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women survey (NCAS): Stakeholder kit*. Sydney: ANROWS. (N.B. This Stakeholder Kit is based on the 2017 NCAS Main Report).

This resource is one of ten resources within the toolkit- Re-shaping Attitudes: A toolkit for using the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) in the primary prevention of violence against women. For more information, please visit www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/research

Suggested citation

Respect Victoria, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Swinburne University of Technology, (2020) Re-shaping Attitudes: A toolkit for using the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) in the primary prevention of violence against women, Respect Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

For more information or to provide feedback on this resource or toolkit, please contact research@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au.

